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LETTER DATED 21 JULY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the letter dated 19 July 1999 from the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, addressed to you on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (see annex).

May I request your kind assistance in having the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Letter dated 19 July 1999 from the President of Georgia addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Government and people of Georgia, I want to express our gratitude for your continued efforts to help reach a comprehensive political settlement in Abkhazia, Georgia.

For six years now, the United Nations has been actively engaged in the peace operation in Abkhazia and has greatly facilitated the long process of achieving a peaceful resolution to this conflict. For six years the process of restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia has been under way with the United Nations and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, with the Russian Federation as facilitators. However, this process has been plagued by setbacks which have seriously affected the social and economic conditions of the refugees and displaced persons. This was evidenced by the tragic events of May 1998, when more than 40,000 spontaneous returnees to the Gali region had to flee their homes for the second time, leaving behind nearly 100 dead and their property in ruins, property which had been rebuilt with the help of the international community.

Regrettably, the violence of Abkhaz separatists against the Georgian population still continues and seriously threatens the peace process. Particularly disturbing are statements made by the Abkhaz authorities alluding to the possibility of a recurrence of the type of events that occurred in May 1998. The separatists are planning to hold so-called presidential elections this autumn, and this clearly indicates that the influence of those forces that want to retain the status quo in the conflict zone remains strong.

Georgia fully supports the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russian operation in Kosovo under the Security Council resolution. We believe that only such decisive measures could have put an end to the tragic developments in that troubled region. Because the situation in Abkhazia cannot be fully equated to that in Kosovo, it would be difficult to apply the same peace enforcement mechanisms for its settlement. It must, however, be taken into account that both cases involve ethnic cleansing and ethnic-related violence. In Kosovo's case, the violence is carried out against the minorities, whereas in Abkhazia, however paradoxical it may sound, the source, rather than the target, of the violence is the ethnic minority, with the vigorous backing of outside forces. The causes behind both conflicts are also similar and are rooted in the totalitarian-communist past.

The fate of 300,000 refugees and displaced persons who have for six years been desperately waiting to return to their homes and the thousands of peaceful civilian casualties murdered by the separatists can be classified only as ethnic cleansing.

While the United Nations may not be able to carry out an operation in Georgian similar to the one in Kosovo, I do believe that the United Nations should assume a more firm and uncompromising position towards the separatists who have blatantly disregarded all the Security Council resolutions. It was the

refusal to comply with the decisions of the United Nations that necessitated the operation in Kosovo. International organizations must be unwavering to those who disregard the will of the world community.

I hope that the report you will be submitting to the Security Council on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, will make a harsher evaluation of the destructive policy pursued by the separatist Abkhaz regime, which continues to stall the process of the return of the refugees and displaced persons. The unilateral initiative of the Abkhaz leadership regarding the return of the refugees has consisted, up to now, only of empty words.

I also hope that you will actively support our appeal that in its resolution on Abkhazia, Georgia, the Security Council would warn the separatist regime that more drastic measures will be taken if they continue their non-compliance with the Council's demands, with regard both to the respect of the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Georgia, and to the immediate start of the safe and dignified return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes. The Council should also condemn as illegitimate the so-called elections, at any level, on the territory of Abkhazia, until the process of the return of the refugees and displaced persons is complete.

In its resolution, the Security Council should also take into account the final documents of the Budapest and Lisbon summits concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, stressing the fact of ethnic cleansing having been carried out against the Georgian population.

Let me reiterate that we do not call for a peace enforcement operation similar to the one that has been carried out in Kosovo. We remain committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict. But if the resolutions of the Security Council do not provide a clear and firm assessment of the destructive policy of the separatists, we may not be able to further prevent spontaneous actions on the part of the refugees and the serious consequences for regional peace and security that such actions would precipitate.

The Council should consider as a matter of utmost urgency the full resumption of the functions of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) as provided in its mandate, including reinforcing the monitoring of the human rights situation. We view the full-scale UNOMIG operation as a necessary prerequisite for guaranteeing the security of the returnees. We therefore request you to renew the consultations on the proposals set out in your report of 11 May 1998 (S/1998/375) concerning the introduction of self-protection units. I also believe that the time is ripe to begin consultations on giving UNOMIG police functions as well.

I want to once again express our readiness to start, forthwith, a political dialogue on questions related to granting Abkhazia a high degree of autonomy within the Georgian State. In this regard, we would welcome it if you would work out a model for conducting Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations on the above issue.

I thank you for your consideration of these matters.

(Signed) Eduard SHEVARDNADZE